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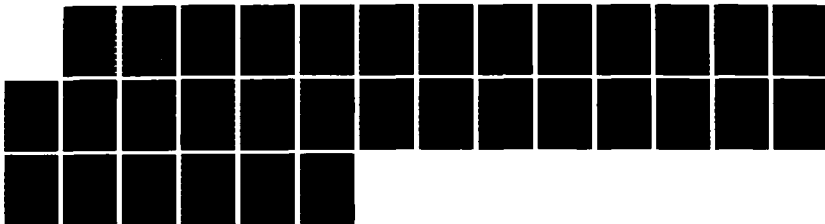
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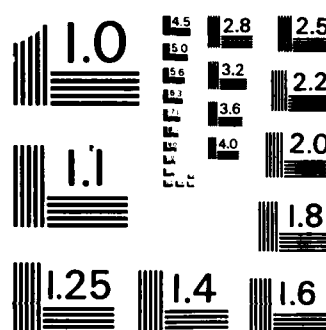
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This paper examines the IRA as a terrorist group, looking at its historical background, analyzing the group as it changed from fighting the British rule in all Ireland, to battling the new Irish State, to the struggle in Northern Ireland. Topics discussed include the IRA's ideology, sources of financial and moral support, organization, and prospects for the future.

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Richard G. Stevens

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THE IRA: AN EXAMINATION OF A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

by  
Timothy M. Collins  
Major, USAF

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PAPER APPROVED:

*Joseph E. Goldberg*

JOSEPH E. GOLDBERG, PhD  
Adjunct Professor

*Barbara J. Kuennecke*

BARBARA J. KUENNECKE, CAPT, USAF  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	3
THE CONTEMPORARY IRA	11
CONCLUSIONS	20
ENDNOTES	23
BIBLIOGRAPHY	26

## INTRODUCTION

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) is one of the world's best known and oldest terrorist group/liberation movements. Like any organization such as this, what you term it depends upon whether you support or oppose its goals. The IRA probably enjoys more support in the United States, both direct and indirect, than any other terrorist group. This fact in itself is strange since most Americans are on record as opposing terrorism. The IRA, however, has been able to sell itself to many Americans as a "freedom fighting" organization instead of a terrorist group and therefore win their support. While the majority of Irish-Americans abhor violence, many still give financial support to Irish "relief" organizations, knowing very well that the money will end up in the hands of the IRA. The idea of a united Ireland, free from all British domination, is very strong among all Irish. Because Irish-Americans are insulated from the violence that the IRA causes, they are more able to justify giving aid to Ireland through pro-IRA organizations. If the money ends up in the hands of terrorists, they believe it isn't their fault. Besides, the cause is just even if they themselves don't approve of the methods.

This paper will examine the IRA as a terrorist group, looking at its historical background, analyzing the group as it changed from fighting against British rule in all Ireland, to battling the new Irish State, to the struggle in Northern Ireland. I will also look at how the group's ideology has

changed over the years, especially examining the causes of the split in the IRA that took place in 1969-1970. In addition, I will look at the IRA's sources of financial and moral support. Also, I will look at the organization of the IRA, both its political and military faces. Finally, I will look at what went wrong in Ireland, especially in the North, and try to determine if there is any hope for a resolution to the seemingly hopeless situation there.

The "Irish Problem" has been around for over 800 years. Whatever the solution may be, it will not be an easy one.



## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In order to understand any terrorist organization, one must always start with a look at where it came from and what its present perspectives are based on. This is crucial with the IRA. The situation in Northern Ireland has frequently been looked at by naive observers as merely a religious struggle between Catholic and Protestant Irish. This is a vast oversimplification of the problem. It would be akin to describing the Palestinian problem as a struggle between Jewish and Islamic Palestinians. The Irish problem has always been a struggle between the Irish and the English over the control of Ireland. The ramifications of that struggle are still present today. It is also the struggle among the Irish themselves over the issue of the "real" Republic.

English involvement in Ireland began in 1155 when Pope Adrian IV, a man named Nicholas Breakspear, the only Englishman to have occupied that position, issued a papal bull that proclaimed the English King, Henry II, to be King of Ireland.(1) The English King distributed land to his loyal Norman barons and to some Irish provincial kings who were willing to pay him tribute.(2) This was the beginning of a long process in which the native Irish were driven off their land and made tenants in their own country. Many of these new landowners intermarried over the years and, subsequently, the only real area of English rule was in an area around Dublin called the "Pale".(3) The situation became even worse for the Irish after

the English Reformation when the Tudor King Henry VIII broke with Rome and declared himself to be head of the Church in England.

Henry VIII was the first English king to have himself declared King of Ireland. When he broke with Rome, the Irish believed that he forfeited his right to Ireland he claimed under the papal bull of 1155.(4) Until the reign of Queen Elizabeth I however, the English Reformation really only affected the English ruling class in Ireland and not the large Catholic Irish population.(5)

After the English Reformation, there was a great deal of animosity by the English towards the Catholic Irish. Queen Mary began a colonization program that displaced native Irish from their land and gave it to English or Scottish settlers.(6) In order to prevent the loss of all their land, some Irish chieftains swore allegiance to the English crown and adopted a feudal system, a system foreign to the Irish communal ownership system.

Queen Elizabeth I feared that a Catholic Ireland might become a stepping stone to conquest of England for Catholic Spain. She sent one of her favorites, the Earl of Essex, to conquer and colonize the country. This began the centuries of despoilation, oppression, and mass displacement of the Irish people by the English that still colors their relationships today.(7) Irish antagonism toward the English was further deepened by the attempts to impose the doctrine and liturgy of the Anglican Church on the Irish.(8)

In 1610, King James I handed over the six Ulster counties in northeastern Ireland to "Undertakers" to be colonized by Protestants, primarily Scottish Presbyterians. Lands in other parts of Ireland were also seized but colonization did not take place to the extent that it did in the North. The centuries of massacre and rebellion that have followed when Protestant fought Catholic were as much an effort by the native Irish to regain their land as they were religious wars.(9)

Irish nationalism attempted to assert itself during the period of British occupation and colonization. It was not until the nineteenth century however, when most Irish had lost any hope of ever regaining control of their own country, that the seeds of the Irish Republic were planted. Roots of the IRA begin with the founding of the Fenian Brotherhood in the United States by three Irish revolutionaries, Michael Doheny, John Mahoney, and James Stephens in 1858. Stephens formed a similar secret, oath-bound society in Ireland that later came to be called the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB).(10) The IRB languished until the issue of home rule was raised in the early twentieth century, and the Ulster Protestants formed the Ulster Volunteer Force to combat it.(11) The decision to rise violently against British rule was made at a meeting of the IRB shortly after World War I began in August 1914.(12) IRB representatives in the United States were rounding up financial support and had even approached the Germans as potential allies.(13) Plans were made for an uprising in April 1916. German arms never arrived and the uprising, like many other

early Irish revolutionary efforts at violence, was a shambles.(14) On Easter Monday however, approximately 1000 members of the Volunteers and the Citizen Army took up positions at various locations in Dublin. A proclamation of the Irish Republic was read to a crowd gathered in front of the General Post Office. With this declaration of the Republic, the Irish Republican Army was born. The small British garrison stationed in Dublin was taken by surprise and reinforcements were rushed in from England. A cordon of British troops was formed around the city center where the rebels were entrenched. The cordon was tightened and, with much of central Dublin in flames from British bombardment, Patrick Pearse, commander in chief of the Irish forces, formally surrendered unconditionally.(15)

The Easter Rising did not initially gain the support of the Irish people. In fact, while less than 3000 were involved fighting the British in Dublin, over 100,000 Irish were fighting for Great Britain in World War I even though they were not subject to conscription.(16)

The Easter Rising, however, turned out to be the crack in the dam. Slowly, then increasing to a great cascade, Irish public opinion shifted to support of the rebels.(17) The IRA waged a guerrilla war of independence against the British as the armed force of the provisional Irish Republic. The IRA's status as the armed force of a free Ireland was soon to change however. In 1920, British Prime Minister Lloyd George enacted a bill titled the Better Government of Ireland Act. It was a combination of Irish home rule and partition. The six counties

of Ulster, primarily Protestant, were to be separated from the 26 Catholic counties of the south. Two parliaments would be elected. A Council of Ireland would deal with issues concerning both North and South. This tragic decision to partition Ireland is the root cause of the violence in the North today. It polarized the two communities in Northern Ireland, dividing them not over theological differences, but over conflicting nationalist aspirations.(18) The British decision to guarantee the rights of the Protestant Unionists, really guaranteed the exclusion from power of the Catholic minority. The guarantee never gave the Unionists any incentive to enter into any meaningful dialogue with the Irish Republicans.(19)

The British held elections to these two Irish parliaments. The Sinn Fein (Workers Party), a political party founded in 1905 with links to the IRB, used the British election as a means of electing delegates to their own second Dail Eireann, the parliament of the Republic (the first had been convened in 1919). They carried 124 of the 128 seats and abstained from sitting in the British sponsored parliament. Partition, however, shattered the Sinn Fein movement. Republican leader Eamon de Valera met with Lloyd George in 1921 and agreed to send five members of the Dail to discuss the Irish problem. The members were convinced by the British to accept partition, promising future negotiations on boundaries, and dominion status. The treaty establishing the Irish Free State was signed and the delegation returned to Dublin. Hardline Republicans argued that a partitioned, semisovereign Ireland was not what

the fight was all about. However, the treaty was ratified and the Irish Free State came into existence. The Irish people were ready to stop the fighting and accept the Free State. The Army of the Free State and the "irregular" IRA clashed, since both considered themselves the armed forces of the legitimate government. Civil war raged for over a year; now, however, it was Irish Catholic against Irish Catholic.(20)

The Sinn Fein disputed the 1923 elections to the British sponsored Dail and refused to take its seats. De Valera however, finding non-participation unproductive, formed the Fianna Fail Party in 1926.(21) His party won 44 seats in the 1927 elections and entered the Dail, refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the crown required by the 1922 agreements.(22)

In order to weaken the IRA, De Valera attempted to absorb them into the government of the Free State. Ex-IRA members staffed the Special Branch and a volunteer militia was set up to lure potential IRA members into a military organization with regular pay and uniforms.(23) Connections with Britain were gradually broken by the Dublin government under the leadership of the Fianna Fail Party. An obscure Fianna Fail politician was named Governor-General.(24) The attempts still did not satisfy the unreconciled Republicans, legally known as the Sinn Fein Party, covertly as the IRA. These men worked at breaking all connections with Britain and establishing the "real" Republic.(25)

The Constitution of 1937 finally completed the break between the Free State and Great Britain. All references to the crown

were omitted and the Republic was defined as all the 32 counties of Ireland. By 1939, the IRA no longer seemed a potent force. Many of its members were either in prison or had joined De Valera's Fianna Fail. The IRA did use British preoccupation with World War II to strike out at their old enemy. One incident in Coventry killed five and injured 60. The Fianna Fail finally cracked down hard on the IRA in the south. De Valera also wanted an end to partition but he was convinced that violence would only make it more difficult. Hundreds of IRA men were rounded up, tried, and interned. By the end of the war the IRA was seriously weakened, and its main goal, end of the partition of the island, 'seemed no closer to realization.(26)

The war, however, had weakened the British as much as it had the IRA. De Valera saw it as his opportunity to push for an end of the partition by peaceful means. The campaign of words failed, primarily because the Unionists still refused to have anything to do with the Republic, and the British guarantee to them remained in force.

In the immediate post-war years, it appeared that the Fianna Fail had finally won over the IRA. Its goal of reunion was well-known, and it had ended all British control over the areas under its jurisdiction. The IRA resurfaced though, and a guerrilla war was fought in the border area between 1956-1962. The governments on both sides of the border implemented the same response: internment, some censorship, and special trials. By the late 1960's it appeared that the IRA had been finally shattered. The friendly relations between the North and South

even diffused the partition issue.(27) The civil unrest that began in Northern Ireland in 1968 ushered in a new era for the IRA. In fact, it is the post-1968 IRA that most people think of when the IRA is mentioned.

Although the IRA seemed on several occasions to be dead, the fuel which fed its fires was always there: the partition and the controversy over the "real" Republic. The IRA member believed that no matter what action it took, the government in Dublin was still a successor to the Irish Free State, the betrayer of the Republic. The IRA member, therefore, denies the validity of both the Dublin government and any administration in Northern Ireland. Since the declaration of the Irish Free State in 1922 with its own armed forces, the IRA ceased being the army of a Republic and became a terrorist organization dedicated to establishing its version of the Republic in all of Ireland.



## THE CONTEMPORARY IRA

The IRA differs greatly from other terrorist organizations currently operating in Europe. It has a very long history and a semi-legitimate heritage. The goal of the IRA, to secure an independent, united Ireland, is straightforward and well-known. Although it is divided into various factions, it is not splintered to the extent that an organization such as the PLO is.

As evident in the history of the IRA, it considers itself the only legitimate voice of Irish aspirations for a united and free Ireland. According to the IRA, the present Irish government in Dublin betrayed the ideals of the Easter Rising of 1916 and sold out to the British. To the IRA, the situation in the North is even worse: Irish land still controlled by the same masters, the British and their Protestant supporters.

Although the IRA is opposed to the Dublin government, it has concentrated its efforts on ending British rule in the North. Evidently, the consolidation of its power in the South will follow that. The Dublin government finds itself therefore, placed in a very difficult position. While it has always supported unification in the long run, it has been inconsistent and uncertain about it in the short run.(28) From the late 1930's, the government realized that unification could not be achieved by force. However, it also realized that the guarantees made to the Unionists by the British in the 1920's made peaceful unification a very remote possibility. The people

of the Republic show no overwhelming enthusiasm for unification either. They support it only abstractly, but will bear no financial, social, or political cost. They avoid making changes that would reassure the Protestants in the north that their position in any all-Irish state would be protected.(29) They realize that forceful unification would trigger a campaign of violence in the south by Unionists. After all the years of suffering that they endured, they want no part of it. They would rather live peacefully in a divided Ireland than to live in a war-ravaged united Ireland.

The IRA has been illegal in the Republic since the founding of the Free State and all the three main political parties in Dublin: Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, and Labour, have reaffirmed this whenever they have been in power. The political front of the IRA, the Sinn Fein, is legal in the Republic although not in the north.(30) From 1956-1962, the IRA was discouraged in its attempts to get support for an uprising from Catholics on both sides of the border.(31) The organization was, once more, thought to have reached the end of its existence. It was during this period however, that radicals were able to take control of the organization. The Official IRA (OIRA) fell under the control of a revolutionary Trotskyist faction that rejected the idea of reunification except as a means to a wider revolutionary end, seeing their goal as the overthrow of the whole capitalist, bourgeois, democratic structure that had humiliated them and substituting it with a totalitarian Marxist republic.(32) They believed in violence directed at British authorities, not random

acts of violence that could injure members of the working class, both Protestant and Catholic. They believed it was the bisectarian working class that needed to be radicalized to achieve the revolution.

This new Marxist-oriented IRA set out on its new course of revolution first, reunification second. The idea of a Marxist revolution did not appeal to the workers of Northern Ireland or the Republic. Like many radical organizations, the Official IRA had its head in the clouds. It preached worker solidarity but ignored the hostilities that divided the Catholic and Protestant workers. They hated each other far too much to ever cooperate in overthrowing capitalism. The Official IRA increasingly believed that British exploitation of all workers was the root cause of the hostility. They believed that the British benefited from the hostilities between the two communities in Northern Ireland since it distracted them from the real problem. While the Catholics in Northern Ireland ignored the new politics of the IRA, they still looked to the IRA as the protector of their well-being. They believed that the IRA would come to their defense against Protestant attacks.

The events that occurred in Northern Ireland beginning in 1968 were not really part of any IRA program. The Catholics in Northern Ireland, frustrated at their lack of power in the society became involved in a civil rights campaign to increase their participation in running their own lives. This civil rights activity naturally provoked the Protestant Unionist who always feared any power-sharing with the Catholics. Sectarian

violence broke out with Protestants attacking Catholics. The Catholics turned to the IRA for help but, to their dismay, the new philosophy of the IRA prevented it from coming to their assistance.

The Official IRA believed that the sectarian violence aided only the British since it further divided the working class in the country. During bloody rioting in Belfast in August 1969, the IRA, not wishing to ignite even bloodier fighting between Protestant and Catholic working class members, did not get involved in the fighting even though Protestant mobs were attacking Catholics aided by the Protestant Police. The Catholics were enraged since their "soldiers" didn't come to their aid. Many members of the IRA were angered at the instructions of the Marxists and political theorists who had been their leaders since the early 1960's. This difference in opinion about how to react to the violence in the North caused a split in the IRA. The IRA was concerned about the fate of the Catholics in the North, but they were more concerned with the civil rights campaign there and solving the problems of unemployment, bad housing, and other social problems in the South.

The Catholics in Northern Ireland were outraged by the lack of armed support they received from the IRA. Slogans such as "IRA = I Ran Away" were common throughout Catholic areas of the province.(33) Many members of the IRA could no longer tolerate this situation; they formed their own "Provisional Committee" and assumed the role of urban guerrillas.(34)

The Provisional IRA (PIRA) was initially faced with a major problem in Northern Ireland. It determined that the enemy to fight was the British. However, it was the British troops, not the IRA, that had protected the Catholics from attacks during the sectarian violence. The Catholics therefore, looked rather favorably upon the British troops. Their anger was directed against the Protestant political and economic control of the North, symbolized by the parliament and government at Stormont and the local security forces.(35) The PIRA began an intense campaign to portray the British as the "real" enemy in the North. Because of initial British refusal to withdraw support from the Stormont government, this policy finally succeeded. The British lost their image as protectors of the Catholic minority and became identified as the supports of the Protestant regime.

During 1970, the North slid into chaos. The PIRA began their guerrilla actions in 1971. A PIRA sniper killed the first British soldier. The bombing campaign began, killing numerous innocent Protestants and Catholics. These actions of the PIRA constitute the IRA in the minds of most people today.(36)

The Northern Irish Stormont government was unable to control the increasing violence. It met for the last time on 28 March 1972 to resign officially. Direct rule by Westminster began on 30 March 1972.(37) Proposals and counter-proposals have been put forward trying to resolve the situation. Unfortunately, the state of affairs remains much as it was fifteen years ago.

Like the Official IRA, the PIRA is basically a military

organization that operates out of sight, although it has a political apparatus that gives it some legitimacy.

The IRA, as it emerged from the Irish Civil War, 1923-1924, was organized into small, underground units that were scattered on both sides of the border. Each IRA unit was entitled to send a delegate to IRA Conventions, usually held annually.(38) Twelve members were elected to form an Executive Committee. It was at the Convention held in December 1969, that the Provisionals left the Official IRA, claiming that many of their delegates were either kept away from the Convention or not informed of the time and location of the meeting.(39)

Just as the Official IRA has its political front organization, the Sinn Fein, the PIRA has the same. Its front is the Provisional Sinn Fein. Unlike the Official Sinn Fein, it has no official recognition in either the Republic or in Northern Ireland.(40)

While the Sinn Fein advocates a marxist dictatorship, the goals of the Provisional Sinn Fein are quite different. Although most unsophisticated PIRA members probably assume they are fighting just for a united Republic, the actual goal goes beyond that. The Provisional Sinn Fein advocates the formation of a Eire Nua or New Ireland. This would be a federation of the four historic Irish Provinces: Ulster, Connact, Leinster, and Munster. The federal capital would be in Athlone, not Dublin, the seat of the present Republic. Substantial powers would be held by the four parliaments, one of which, the Parliament of Ulster (Dail Uladh), would have a Protestant majority.(41) The

new state would forge strong links with the third world.

The plan also calls for substantial economic changes. They would nationalize key industries, end foreign control over the Irish economy, withdraw from the EEC, and find ways to better use Ireland's natural resources.(42)

The type of government envisioned by the Provisional Sinn Fein is similar to the Social Democratic governments of Western Europe. A third splinter group of the IRA, the Irish National Liberation Army, combines the objectives of both the Provisionals and the Officials. They want the Marxist dictatorship advocated by the Officials, achieved through the guerrilla war advocated by the Provisionals.(43)

The military organization of the PIRA was initially borrowed from forms used during the 1919-1921 period. Units were organized into brigades, battalions, companies, and so on.(44) This type of organization proved far too subject to penetration by British agents, and the PIRA today is organized along the continental cellular model, appropriate to a terrorist organization.(45) They adopted many of the features of other international terrorist organizations such as the Baader-Meinhof Gang, the Red Brigades, and Palestinian terrorist groups.(46)

Although the IRA directs its activities against the British both in Ireland and England, it does enjoy a great deal of international support, both moral and materiel. The Official IRA is naturally supported, at least morally, by most Communists. While the terrorist actions of the PIRA are not officially backed by Communists, the chaos that these acts cause

in Britain is certainly welcomed.

Much of the credit for the moral support the IRA enjoys is due to a very effective propaganda campaign. The PIRA has been able, through friendly or ambivalent journalists, to have the conflict in Northern Ireland portrayed as "Britain's Vietnam".(47) Effective propaganda campaigns enable the PIRA to continue its struggle since it realizes that effective psychological attacks can sometimes force a government, such as Britain, to abandon a struggle, even though its forces are in no danger of defeat. What initially appears a cause worth fighting for gradually becomes a liability that has to be dropped.(48)

The Catholics are also victims of propaganda. Sympathy within the Catholic communities on both sides of the border affords the terrorist the protection of the people, much like that provided to Mao's guerrillas in China by the peasants.

Propaganda is also effective in making the struggle against the PIRA seem unending. The PIRA preaches that as long as one fighter remains the struggle will continue. Since security forces cannot eliminate every opponent, victory seems impossible.(49)

One of the most effective propaganda campaigns was launched in the United States. It was perfect place for it. There were many Americans of Irish heritage, and, traditionally, Americans had championed the struggle of groups against colonialism, especially British. America also had the money the PIRA needed to finance its activities. The NORAIID organization, linked to the Provisional Sinn Fein, established itself in New York. It



portrayed itself as a charitable organization. When its arms-purchasing activities became too well-known in the 1970's, it had to drop its posture as a charitable group.(50) New front organizations were created to carry on the campaign. The Washington-based Irish National Caucus, although covertly devoted to terrorism, knew that it could not reveal this to the American public. It therefore picked up on the issue of human rights to win popular condemnation of British activities in Northern Ireland.(51)

The PIRA also established links with the revolutionary left in France, West Germany, Italy, Holland, Spain, Austria, and Belgium. It has also received assistance from solidarity committees and formed informal relations with terrorist groups in these countries. Libya has openly supported the PIRA and provided arms and funds. In June 1972, Colonel Gaddafi on the second anniversary of his revolution stated, "There are arms, and there is support for the revolutionaries of Ireland." (52) Close links have also been formed with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.(53) Some joint operations have been a recent activity. Father O'Neill of St. Eugene's Catholic Cathedral in Londonderry drew public attention when, in May 1972, he revealed that two North Koreans, an Algerian, and a number of Englishmen were among the hard-core gunmen of the PIRA.(54) Although PIRA continues to cloak itself in traditional Irish nationalism, it has linked itself with international terrorism, a fact it does not publicize.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although there have been some recent changes, the outlook for a solution to the problems in Ireland in the near future is not good. The divisions between Catholic and Protestant communities are deeper, wider, more bitter and seemingly more irresolvable than ever before. While it may seem the only solution is to unite Ireland, the very idea of this is simply not acceptable to the Unionists. The recent agreement between Great Britain and the Irish Republic allowing the Republic a say in the affairs of the North is even too drastic a step to the Unionists. Their behavior though, can be understood if we look at them as they see themselves, a threatened minority on the island of Ireland.(55)

As a terrorist organization, the IRA does have three factors to exploit: possession of living historical rituals that give it the legitimacy of a long tradition, the reluctance of the population to betray those who advocate the old ideals of the people, and a position as Catholic defenders in the North.(56) The IRA would like the other players looked at according to their perspective: the Dublin government as a betrayer of the ideals of the original Republicans, the British as long-standing exploiters of Ireland, and Northern Irish administrations as hardline Protestants determined never to allow integration into any all-Ireland government.

The IRA has been able to win the support of many who otherwise oppose terrorism because its propaganda has been

successful. Irish Nationalism and the traditions of the Irish Republican Army prior to the formation of the Free State are very appealing to all Irish. The IRA has captialized on these sympathies and portrayed themselves as the inheritors of these traditions. In reality, the only relationship between the historic IRA and the IRA of today is in name only. They have become one of many terrorist organizations. They know that if a successful propaganda campaign were launched that really showed their true colors, their support would decrease substantially. The leaders of the Republic have been attempting to demonstrate that one can be an Irish nationalist without supporting the IRA.

Many mistakes have been made in Ireland over the centuries. Recent blunders have been responsible for the tragic situation today. Some could have been avoided. The British could have granted Free State status to all of Ireland in the 1920's. The partition polarized the two communities and the divisions have only grown deeper. The IRA could have gone along with the Free State, at least as an interim measure (the Free State did steadily cut ties to the British). The Irish Republic could have drafted a constitution that did not give the Catholic Church a special position, further convincing Northern Protestants that they would drown in a sea of Catholics if Ireland were united.

The PIRA has recently made some organizational changes that may indicate a change in tactics. Gerry Adams, an MP from West Belfast and President of the Provisional Sinn Fein, was made Chief of Staff of the PIRA. For the first time, one man

controls both the political and military arms of the PIRA. His bullet/ballot box strategy: hitting military and economic targets while continuing the struggle on the political front, may have convinced both the British and Irish governments that they needed to take the initiative on the political front. The new agreement may, over a long period of time, convince the Protestant majority that association with the Republic does not mean their immediate doom.

The past in Ireland cannot be changed. We are confronted with a problem that has no easy solution. The IRA will live until the Irish problem is solved. The IRA does not have the support of the vast majority of Catholics in Ireland, but its long history prevent it from being totally despised either. Any real solution will be far off and slow in coming.

## ENDNOTES

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